

Virtual Charter Schools

OFFICE OF PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS

Draft Project Scope

August 2006

It is the intent of the Idaho Legislature to provide opportunities for charter schools which operate separately from traditional public school districts. One legislative objective of establishing charter schools is to make virtual distance and online learning available. According to state law, virtual charter schools primarily use online and distance learning technologies for providing instruction to students that may live in various areas of the state. Virtual charter schools may be approved by the state's Charter School Commission, or by the State Board of Education. As of fiscal year 2006, four virtual charter schools are operating in the state.

Questions have been raised about virtual charter schools compliance and operation under various requirements and processes. In particular, policymakers have questioned how well virtual schools ensure adherence to different academic instruction and accountability requirements. Additionally, policymakers are interested in better understanding how current funding mechanisms work for virtual charter schools given that different operational approaches are used compared to traditional schools. An evaluation of Idaho's virtual charter schools would provide policymakers with information about how well the schools meet various requirements, and how they operate under the current funding structure.

This evaluation would focus on the following questions:

- What requirements exist for virtual charter schools regarding the delivery, content, and effectiveness of academic instruction, programs, and testing? How do the requirements compare to those directed to traditional public schools? How do the requirements compare to those of virtual schools operated in other states?
- What processes do virtual charter schools have to ensure they meet requirements related to academic instruction and programs? How well do the schools meet these requirements? How do the processes compare to those of virtual schools in other states?
- How much funding are virtual charter schools receiving and expending? What types of revenues and expenditures do virtual charter schools have, and how do these compare to traditional public schools? How well does the current funding structure align with any unique operational needs experienced by virtual charter schools? How does funding compare with virtual schools operated in other states?

Requested by Superintendent Marilyn Howard through Senator John Goedde